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Review of the implementation of the recommendations and decisions adopted by the General Assembly at its tenth special session: Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters

Work of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters held its thirty-fourth and thirty-fifth sessions in New York from 31 January to 2 February 2000 and in Geneva from 5 to 7 July 2000, respectively.

At its first session, the Board stressed that there was an urgent need to combat complacency in the face of new and alarming dangers to international security such as an enhanced emphasis on nuclear weapons in military doctrines, missile proliferation and the possible deployment of national missile defence systems. With a view to combating that complacency in the long term, the Board recommended that a study be commissioned on disarmament and non-proliferation education and training and developed a draft mandate for the study.

The Board discussed the prospects for the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (April/May 2000) and the significance of the adoption of the Conference's Final Document (NPT/CONF.2000/28 (Parts I-IV)). In examining the issue of small arms proliferation in the light of the 2001 United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, the Board clarified several goals and objectives of the meeting. At its July meeting, the Board began consideration of the question of the revolution in military affairs (RMA) and will continue such consideration at future meetings. A summary of the Board's discussions is included

* A/55/150 and Corr.1 and 2.

** The present report covers the results of two sessions of the Advisory Board, 31 January-2 February and 5-7 July 2000.

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in the present report. In response to General Assembly resolution 54/54 K, the Board forwarded to the Secretary-General "inputs ... on information with regard to specific measures that could significantly reduce the risk of nuclear war", suggesting four measures on which emphasis should be placed to reduce nuclear danger. A summary of that discussion is contained in a separate report to the Assembly (A/55/324). In its capacity as Board of Trustees of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), the Board approved for submission to the Assembly the report of the Director of the Institute on its activities from July 1999 to July 2000 and the programme of work and budget for 2001 (see A/55/267).

I. Introduction

1. The Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters* held its thirty-fourth and thirty-fifth sessions in New York from 31 January to 2 February 2000 and in Geneva from 5 to 7 July 2000, respectively. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 38/183 O of 20 December 1983. The report of the Board on its work as Board of Trustees of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) has been presented in a separate document (A/55/267). The "inputs" of the Board in response to the request made in Assembly resolution 54/54 K of 1 December 1999 entitled "General and complete disarmament: reducing nuclear danger" are contained in a separate report of the Secretary-General (A/55/324).

2. Miguel Marín Bosch, Consul General of Mexico in Barcelona, chaired the two sessions of the Board in 2000.

3. Below are some of the salient points of the Board's deliberations during the two sessions and the specific recommendations it conveyed to the Secretary-General.

A. Nuclear issues

4. The overarching theme of the thirty-fourth session of the Board was the need to combat governmental and public complacency, bordering on apathy, with respect to the increasingly alarming threats to international security. One threat was in the form of a new arms race, whose latest manifestation was the possibility of a race in offensive ballistic missiles. The proliferation of ballistic missile defence systems would unbalance the strategic stability of the last 50 years based on nuclear deterrence. Though perverse, the capability of mutual assured destruction between the major nuclear-weapon States, and the ability, possessed by the other nuclear-weapon States, to wreak a level of destruction on an opponent was the basis of a doctrine aimed at providing the world with a degree of assurance that such weapons of mass destruction would never be used. Building down the nuclear threat while maintaining strategic stability should be the order of the day. Certainly expanding that threat in the name of security made little sense. The possible dismantling of the current strategic security structure in favour of a system whereby each State sought its own invulnerability would lead, according to one member, to "nuclear anarchy". Another side of this issue is the growing threat of missile proliferation, which is both cause and effect of the current crisis.

5. Among other catalysts were the preparations being made by the United States of America for a national missile defence (NMD) system and its possible effect on the bilateral Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems (ABM Treaty).[1] It was noted that NMD was, among other things, a response to missile proliferation development. There was widespread agreement that the effects of breaching the ABM Treaty would reverberate beyond the boundaries of the two parties to the agreement. The reaction of the Russian Federation to that possibility has been swift. Though several voices on the Board believed that changes in the terms of the ABM Treaty could be negotiated between its two parties and strategic security upheld, other members expressed concern about the reaction of other States to the deployment of an NMD system. They feared that other States would use the development of an NMD system by the major nuclear-weapon State as justification to create indigenous NMD systems, including weapons of mass destruction, for their own regional or subregional security. It would appear, stated one member, that in contrast to the cold war era when the political situation shaped the weapon, it was now the weapon that was shaping the political situation.

6. The Board generally regretted that the nuclear doctrines promulgated by the nuclear-weapon States still placed great emphasis on the possible use of nuclear weapons. This was the case at a time when those States should be moving away from such a possibility. The arguments put forward in the United States Senate in favour of rejection of the ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) in October 1999 were a disturbing reassertion of the continuation of reliance on the possible use of nuclear weapons. The new draft military doctrine of the Russian Federation, reaffirming the utility of nuclear weapons to guarantee security, was also a reminder of the maintenance of reliance on nuclear weapons.

7. This new security situation was the cause and backdrop of the already stagnant multilateral disarmament agenda, in the Conference on

* Members of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters are listed in the annex to the present report.

Disarmament and in the sessions of the Preparatory Committee for the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) of the last three years. It was evident that the lack of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on a fissile material cut-off treaty and on negative security assurances was not due to the structure of the Conference on Disarmament, but rather to a security and political climate hostile to arms control. The setbacks that the NPT had faced since the 1995 indefinite extension decision were manifold. Despite the discussions on how to begin negotiations for Strategic Arms Reduction (START) III, the lack of formal negotiations between the two major nuclear-weapon Powers on further reductions in strategic nuclear weapons did not augur well for sustaining the basic bargain of article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons between nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon States. The deployment of nuclear weapons in South Asia would also constitute a severe challenge to the Treaty's fundamental purpose. The rejection of the CTBT by the United States Senate had been a serious blow to the Treaty's credibility and the goals set by the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

8. The views in the Board on how or if the NPT would survive these setbacks varied, but at the winter session there was generally little optimism that the 2000 NPT Review Conference would lead to positive results. Instead, members stressed the need to look beyond success or failure of the Conference to the greater need of preserving the nuclear non-proliferation regime and promoting nuclear disarmament in other ways.

9. To that end, the Board urged the Secretary-General to use the moral authority invested in his high office to make appeals to all States, especially the nuclear-weapon States, to overcome their differences and to pursue their fundamental article VI commitment to the eventual elimination of all such weapons. They suggested that those appeals be made not only to disarmament forums, but also to major conferences in other fields. They should also be aimed at world public opinion, for it was essential, according to most members, that people appreciate the risks that were being faced. It was proposed that the focus of a disarmament education campaign (discussed below) should be nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

10. At the second session of the Board in July, members addressed the results of the 2000 NPT Review Conference and opinions varied. For some members from States parties to the Treaty, the Final Document (NPT/CONF.2000/28 (Parts I-IV)) contained new commitments to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation and represented, if not the ideal outcome, then one that was achievable. They were convinced that the basic provisions of the Treaty had emerged strengthened from the 2000 NPT Review Conference, especially in the commitments made under the review of article VI. What was needed now was a consolidation of those gains.

11. For some members from States parties, the results were skewed by the fact that the discussions at the 2000 NPT Review Conference and the agreements reached had not taken account of the heightened debate over the strategic consequences of possible deployment of national missile defences.

12. Members from non-States parties made clear their belief that the results were divorced from the reality of the current political situation, particularly in the nuclear field, and thus irrelevant. The lack of debate in the 2000 NPT Review Conference on the crucial issue of national missile defence plans served only to increase for them that sense of unreality.

13. All members, however, recommended that the Secretary-General continue to focus on the issue of the complete elimination of nuclear weapons and on promoting education about the dangers of nuclear war. Different views were expressed on the Secretary-General's proposal for consideration by the Millennium Summit of an international conference to help identify ways of eliminating nuclear dangers, aimed at attracting the attention of the world community to those urgent needs.

B. General Assembly resolution 54/54 K entitled "General and complete disarmament: reducing nuclear danger"

14. The Board welcomed the opportunity offered by the request made to the Secretary-General in General Assembly resolution 54/54 K to seek inputs on "information with regard to specific measures that would significantly reduce the risk of nuclear war". An outline of the measures it had adduced for reducing

nuclear danger, along with papers prepared by three Board members, Harald Müller, Guillermo González and Arundhati Ghose, was being submitted to the Assembly in a separate report of the Secretary-General (A/55/324). The Board lacked the time to consider those measures in depth and will continue discussing them at future sessions.

C. Small arms in the light of the convening of the 2001 United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects

15. The discussions in the Board on the complex issue of the proliferation of small arms pointed to at least a triple-track approach to the 2001 Conference. The first track could be labelled global consciousness-raising. There is a need to highlight at the international level the highly public and humanitarian aspects of the issue. It is global in that it involves a symbiosis between the developed and the developing world, between suppliers and recipients, and between countries at peace and those in conflict. The non-governmental community and other members of civil society, including private security and banking companies, will play an important part in this effort.

16. The second track would involve the creation of international norms, such as criteria governing the transfer and receipt of small arms. It will be no easy task, however, to distinguish between licit and illicit trade in small arms, bearing in mind the legitimate Charter of the United Nations-given right of self-defence. Given the disparity among and specificity of regions, some members believed that such norms were better elaborated at the regional or even subregional levels.

17. The third track, and by far the most important, involves the efforts, initiatives and activities of regions and subregions on the issue. Those efforts should be undertaken not only during times of conflict or after conflict, but also in a preventive mode. Moreover, sustained efforts were necessary, as the effects of small arms proliferation could last a long time after a conflict ended. The international community will play a pivotal role in supporting regions in those efforts both politically and financially.

D. Revolution in military affairs and its effect on disarmament and arms limitation

18. At its thirty-fifth session, the Board began an examination of the question of the revolution in military affairs (RMA) on the basis of a paper prepared by a Board member, Jean-Marie Guéhenno. The Board recognized that the discussion held was useful, if preliminary. It agreed to study this matter further and to explore in more detail the implications of RMA in a number of areas, especially with regard to future disarmament measures.

E. Education for disarmament

19. In 1978, the Final Document of the Tenth Special Session of the General Assembly[2] (the first special session devoted to disarmament) called for a disarmament education campaign. In 1980, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) held a World Congress on Disarmament Education, which elaborated an ambitious global programme of action for education in the field. However, those were different days, when the threat of nuclear annihilation was keenly felt and the desire for rational control over the nuclear-arms race was great. The Board emphasized the fact that the complacency on nuclear issues today, as discussed above, was the underlying reason for the lack of interest at all levels of education in disarmament issues. The Board extended the scope of the discussion of disarmament education to include education for non-proliferation. Indeed, there are many research institutes around the world that devote themselves to peace studies and conflict resolution or prevention. It is striking, however, that only two institutes of higher learning in the world offer a graduate concentration in non-proliferation.

20. The Board recommended that the Secretary-General highlight the need for disarmament and non-proliferation education at all levels of education, from primary through secondary to higher education, at the Millennium Summit this year. Some members stressed that there was a gaping need for such education among parliamentarians, industrial and business circles, the media and the general public.

21. To the January-February meeting, during the traditional segment with the non-governmental organization community, the Board invited two members of the academic community distinguished in the field of disarmament education: Betty A. Reardon of Teachers College — Columbia University, New York, who stressed the centrality of disarmament education to peace education and the centrality of education to disarmament; and Eudora Pettigrew, Chairman of the International Association of University Presidents (IAUP) and the United Nations-sponsored Commission on Disarmament Education, Conflict Resolution and Peace, who described the challenges of setting up disarmament-related programmes at university levels of education.

22. At the summer session, the President of the NGO Committee on Disarmament (Geneva), David Atwood, its Secretary-General, Colin Archer, and Cate Buchanan of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, presented their joint views in a comprehensive paper to the Board on the subject of disarmament and non-proliferation education. They supported the proposal for a United Nations study on the issue and expressed their readiness to cooperate closely in the venture. The non-governmental organizations and civil society have a long history of education and training in the field and a wealth of relevant experience and expertise that ought to be tapped for such a study.

23. Many ideas arose from the discussion on ways to engage educators in the developed and developing world on disarmament and non-proliferation education. Chief among those ideas was one concerning the use of modern electronic communications methods, especially the Internet. This is an educational tool of vast potential that the Secretary-General and the United Nations ought to exploit thoroughly.

24. In order to refine the concept of disarmament and non-proliferation education in today's world and to give a focus for ideas, it was proposed that the United Nations undertake a study of the issue. At its summer session, the Board developed a draft mandate for such a study for the consideration of the Secretary-General.

II. Board of Trustees of UNIDIR

25. At the winter session, the Director of UNIDIR, Patricia Lewis, gave the Board of Trustees of the Institute an interim update of the Institute's programme of work and adjusted budget estimates for the year 2000.[3]

26. The Director informed the Board of Trustees of plans to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of the Institute during the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly. The opportunity of the commemoration will be seized to seek greater support from the Assembly for strengthening the budget of the Institute.

27. At its summer session, pursuant to article III, paragraph 2 (b), of the Statute of the Institute, the Board approved, for submission to the General Assembly, the programme of work and budget of the Institute for 2001 (see note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Director of UNIDIR — A/55/267).

III. Future work

28. The Board proposed to include the following items in its future work:

(a) Continuation of the discussion of specific measures that would significantly reduce the risk of nuclear war, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 54/54 K;

(b) Continuation of the discussion on the revolution in military affairs (RMA) and its effect on disarmament and arms limitation;

(c) Review of the third mandated function of the Board, namely, "to advise the Secretary-General on the implementation of the United Nations Disarmament Information Programme".

29. Other topics that could be considered are:

(a) Functioning of the non-proliferation regimes and their impact on disarmament in general;

(b) A theme that could emerge from the Millennium Summit;

(c) Conventional disarmament;

(d) A series of papers that examine nuclear-weapon-free zones as a non-proliferation and disarmament approach;

(e) Cultures of violence;

(f) Outer space issues, including a possible arms race in outer space;

(g) Contribution to and results of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects;

(h) The threat of missile proliferation and the impact of missile defences.

Notes

[1] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 944, No. 13446.

[2] General Assembly resolution S-10/2.

[3] The second mandated function of the Advisory Board is to serve as the Board of Trustees of UNIDIR.

Annex

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[b] Participated in the thirty-fifth session of the Advisory Board.